

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY

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Shiur #1: Decorating the Shofar

The mishna (26b) in Rosh Hashana describes the unique ceremony of blowing the shofar in the mikdash. Although the mitzva of shofar applies everywhere, it has a special 'relevance' to the mikdash. Based upon the pasuk in Tehillim 'bachatzozrot ve-kol shofar hariyu lifnei Hamelech Hashem,' the Mishna determines that when the shofar was blown in the Beit Hamikdash on Rosh Hashana it was accompanied by two chatzozrot blown 'alongside' the shofar. In addition, the shofar used in the Mikdash was covered with gold to make the process more aesthetic. Bothered by this scenario, the gemara considers whether a shofar may be 'plated' with any foreign material. This shiur will examine the various concerns the gemara raises regarding these plates or coverings.

The gemara (Rosh Hashana 27a) questions the mishna by citing a source disqualifying a shofar whose mouth is covered with gold. To solve this contradiction, the gemara claims that the mishna (describing the shofar in the Mikdash) refers to a gold plate covering an area other than where the 'ba'al teki'ah' places his mouth. The beraita which prohibited a gold covering referred to gold placed in the area where the mouth blows into the shofar. The gemara provides no reason for the difference between these two situations. To complicate matters further, an ensuing gemara (27b) cites a beraita that any gold covering the inner area of the shofar invalidates the entire shofar. If, however, the gold is plating the outside area of the shofar, the shofar may still be used provided the gold doesn't alter the sound emitting from the shofar. This gemara seems to provide a basis for its ruling - namely, the altering effect of the gold upon the sound. Presumably, ANY gold covering the inner surface area will affect the sound and hence such a scenario is completely unacceptable. By contrast, gold on the outside of the shofar may not influence the sound and hence cannot be absolutely rejected. Its impact upon the sound must first be gauged, and only if such impact is determined can the shofar be invalidated. What is unclear is the

exact relationship between these two statements. If the gemara (27b) already allows gold covering the outside (as long as the sound remains unchanged), then to what scenario does the gemara (27a) refer when it allows gold to cover an area where the mouth doesn't touch the shofar? Doesn't this gemara refer to the outside surface, as well? If so, the two gemarot appear to be redundant!!

The Rishonim deal with these issues in two basic ways. Tosafot claim that indeed these two gemarot, which allow 'gold where the mouth doesn't blow (27a)' and 'gold on the outside of the shofar which doesn't affect the sound (27b)' are essentially identical. Whereas Tosafot themselves ponder the reason why the gemara might have restated the same halakha, the Rosh provides a reason. Any gold on the outside surface which doesn't alter the sound is deemed by the gemara (27b) to be valid. Gold covering the lower end of the shofar (near but not directly where the mouth makes contact) might have raised a different problem – 'shofar b'toch shofar.' The gemara (27b) disqualifies blowing from two shofarot. We might have therefore disqualified SPECIFICALLY a shofar plated with gold near its mouthpiece for this reason. Hence, the gemara felt compelled to directly relate to this scenario and assure us that as long as outside plates do not affect the sound, the shofar may be blown - no matter how close to the mouthpiece the outside plate is.

This concern suggested by the Rosh (as the 'hava amina' of the gemara) highlights an interesting notion surrounding the structure of the shofar. Can we deconstruct the shofar into segments and possibly target the essential part in distinction from the secondary unit? Or do we view the shofar as one undifferentiated instrument? The gemara itself (27b) provokes this question when it discusses the case of a shofar which has split. If the distance from the mouthpiece to the split is larger than the minimum shiur of a shofar, the entire shofar may be used. Does this gemara suggest that the lower part of the shofar is the primary segment, and if the split appears beyond this section the shofar can be validated? Or does the gemara merely intend that the part of the shofar beyond the split is considered as halakhically detached (due to the split), effectively reducing the shofar to a miniature but integrated and undifferentiated shofar? Rashi assumes the second approach. The Ittur, however, extended this concept to other flaws which may potentially disqualify a shofar (such as a hole stopped up with a foreign substance), suggesting that he did indeed envision a

shofar as divisible into sections. Clearly, the 'idea' we might have considered – that any gold (even without affecting the sound) placed specifically on the bottom part of the shofar would render the shofar a 'double shofar' - suggests the Ittur's anatomy of shofar. According to the Rosh by rejecting this notion, does the gemara mean to dismiss the Ittur's position? Or does the gemara negate this possibility for ulterior reasons: maybe a swath of gold cannot qualify as a shofar!! In theory, though, the gemara does regard the bottom part of the shofar with greater sensitivity.

The Ramban develops a different strategy for explaining the two gemarot. The discussion on (27b) centers solely around the issue of affecting the sound. Any inner gold will change the sound and is therefore invalid, while gold plating on the outside must be checked for this effect. The gemara (27a) which distinguished between gold on the mouthpiece and away from the mouthpiece was concerned with a different issue. Aside from the impact upon the sound, there cannot be a chatzitza between the person's mouth and the shofar. Gold on the outside of the shofar – near the mouthpiece - could potentially prevent the mouth of the ba'al teki'ah from touching the shofar. From this the Ramban induces that the ba'al tokei'a must blow directly into the shofar. He cannot blow into the air in the direction of the shofar indirectly causing a sound to emit. The two gemarot were in effect addressing completely different halakhic principles.

This additional halakha of chatzitza arouses much interest among the Rishonim. The Meiri raises an interesting question from a gemara in Sukka (34) regarding the definition of chatzitza. The gemara considers placing a golden wreath around the 4 minim for decoration. Pressured to defend against the problem of chatzitza (the gold band lying between a person's hand and the 4 minim), the gemara responds (at least according to Rava) that anything meant to enhance a mitzva cannot be considered a chatzitza. Based on this yardstick, a gold plate decorating the shofar should also not be considered a chatzitza!!!

There are two basic approaches toward solving the Ramban. One view attempts to differentiate between the gemara in Sukka, which doesn't regard ornamental daled minim binders as chatzitza, and the Ramban, who appears to define a gold decoration lying between the mouth and the shofar as chatzitza. A second strategy (presented by the Avnei Nezer in Siman 434) claims that the Ramban does not disqualify the gold because of chatzitza (since its ornamental). Even items which do not qualify as chatzitza might still prevent actual physical contact and invalidate situations which call for this contact. The Ramban comments on a gemara in Bechorot (9b) which does not regard a fetus as a chatzitza between the twin fetus and the mother's womb (for kedushat bechor purposes), since 'min be-mino einu chotzet' (only foreign items are deemed chatzitza). Commenting upon this gemara, the Ramban still insists that although no chatzitza exists, we cannot deny that one fetus was prevented from full contact with the mother's womb by the other fetus, hence inhibiting the establishment of kedushat bechor. In a similar vein, we cannot view the gold plate as a chatzitza since it decorates the shofar. However, the mouth of the ba'al tokei'a hasn't fully touched the shofar if it is separated by the gold. As such, the blowing is pasul. Of course, the Avnei Nezer does not clarify why exactly such contact between ba'al tokei'a's mouth and the shofar is necessary. Contact was crucial between womb and fetus to install kedushat bechor, but what role does contact between mouth and shofar play?? What function does shofar perform which might necessitate a direct contact between a person's mouth and the shofar?

Ketiva ve-chatima tova

Be-virchat Ha-torah

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